



Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2012¹.

Michael Horton's 'Pilgrim Theology' is a nicely written examination of basic Christian dogma. As such it covers all of the major issues of Christian doctrine including the Bible, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, Salvation, the so called 'Sacraments' (which we Baptists call 'church ordinances'), Eschatology, and the resurrection of the body.

Horton's goal is to present readers an easy yet stimulating entrée to Christian thought hitting the high spots and tracing the outlines of the Church's most important teachings. In this he succeeds. His style is genuinely engaging and his grasp of the material is certainly above average. And, for the most part, very accurate.

For the most part. And with that caveat I would like to discuss the biggest problem with Horton's work before I point out the many positive aspects. And what is the biggest problem with Horton's present work? It demonstrates a failure to appreciate, or evidently grasp, the more mature work of Zwingli on the Lord's Supper.²

In particular, Horton writes

Ulrich Zwingli ... harbored a Platonist antithesis between the visible (material) and invisible (immaterial). Consequently, he could see sacraments only as badges of Christian profession, testimonies to the reality that we have by faith. He could not see sacraments as means through which God actually delivers that reality to us (p. 379).

¹ The edition I reviewed and which is herein discussed is a prepublication copy of the galley proofs. Consequently, pagination may differ in the final print edition. Please do bear that in mind.

² Zwingli's beliefs concerning the Lord's Supper happen to be one of those areas with which I am exceedingly familiar and the fact that Horton 'misses the boat' here is more than a little off-putting.

Horton is wrong here for several reasons. First, he is wrong to portray Zwingli as a Platonist, for while the early Zwingli (pre 1526) held vestiges of Platonic thought by virtue of his humanist training, the later, more mature Zwingli (theologically) certainly did not. Second, Horton's use of the word 'only' betrays a failure to correctly apprehend Zwingli's teaching concerning the Lord's Supper in its entirety. Zwingli never did, and never would have used the word 'only' to describe the Lord's Supper or Baptism in connection with their significance as indications of divine grace. And third, Horton's final phrase 'He could not see sacraments as means through which...' betrays his bias as a Calvinist. Hence, it isn't Christian Doctrine which Horton here offers but Calvinist Doctrine. It isn't 'Reformed' theology (for Zwingli was a Reformer long before Calvin published his first piece) but Calvinist theology.

What, then, are the sources of Horton's views concerning Zwingli's teaching on the Lord's Supper? Only two actually- a compendium of Zwingli's works in English; and his *Commentary on True and False Religion* (from which he only cites one page). This is hardly a well rounded presentation, then, and barely scratches the surface of Zwingli's thought on the matter. Indeed, Horton doesn't make use of Zwingli's mature thought as represented in his later writings; nor does he consult important secondary literature to help guide him through the materials in any sort of substantive or meaningful way.³

Naturally one can't do everything in a volume of 461 pages. But one can, and should, fairly represent the mature thought of one's examples, either pro or con. Illustrating his point from the early Zwingli simply appears to serve as a foil for the Calvinist position which Horton clearly embraces.

Horton's Zwingli is, therefore, a caricature of Zwingli. Horton's readers may not in general recognize the fact, but some will, and it will strike them as both jarring and inappropriate.

Another problem with Horton's volume is his suggestion that it was Satan himself in the Garden who led to humankind's downfall. He writes

It was Satan who first corrupted God's word by addition and then by subtraction and then finally by contradiction(p. 142).

Scholars of the Hebrew Bible will not be impressed by Horton's easy combination of the Serpent with Satan (especially since the book of Genesis never draws such a connection). But this fairly conservative reading of the biblical text is held to throughout as Horton treats Scripture itself as 'infallible'. He attempts to justify his reading by maintaining that

Since [Jesus] has certified his claims by his resurrection, Jesus' view of Scripture must also be our view (p. 52).

³ Horton, and all those interested in the subject of Zwingli's views of the Lord's Supper in both their early and more mature forms should consult Emidio Campi's "Consensus Tigurinus: Werden, Wertung und Wirkung" in *Consensus Tigurinus: Heinrich Bullinger und Johannes Calvin über das Abendmahl* (Zürich: TVZ), 2009, pp. 9-42.

Thought through to its logical conclusion, such a perspective is untenable. First, the Bible of Jesus was the Hebrew Bible, not the New Testament. So what of it? Horton attempts to get around this by suggesting that

Jesus said that to hear the apostles was to hear Jesus himself (p. 52).

That would work if 1) we had any evidence that the Apostles wrote the books attributed to them and 2) if Jesus actually said that himself (if, that is, these are the ‘very words of Jesus’). Since neither of those facts are provable or certain, readers of the New Testament are essentially left on their own. Furthermore, what did the ‘Bible’ of Jesus look like? Did it include Enoch? Sirach? Horton’s notion is problematic and none of the problems are solved by his attempted explanations.

Furthermore, Horton’s ‘maximalist’ viewpoint vis-à-vis the Bible will not find a wide audience willing to accept it outside of fundamentalist / ultra conservative circles. He writes

He [Jesus] treats Abel and Zechariah as historical figures who encompass the whole of Old Testament history... The stories of Noah and the flood and the destruction of Sodom he regards as historical events... (p. 52)

Horton is clear here- since Jesus does, so too must we. He continues, in his discussion of the doctrine of inspiration, to say

As “God-breathed,” Scripture has historically been held by Christians to be inerrant- that is, free of error...

and this ‘inerrancy’

... pertains to the original autographs (p. 57).

And

The point that inerrancy makes is that Scripture faithfully and truthfully reports these events and dialogues (p. 58).

Some readers will be persuaded of Horton’s views because they already hold them. Those who don’t hold them will not be persuaded by Horton’s arguments. For instance, the oft-made suggestion that the original autographs were inerrant is meaningless given the fact that we don’t have any of them. Anything at all can be claimed for something one doesn’t have. We could also claim that those original inerrant texts were written on silver sheets but since we don’t have them, the claim is meaningless.

Horton’s volume, then, has its problems. But it also has its good points. Horton is a vivid writer capable of drawing his readers minds to just the issue he wishes to discuss. He illustrates his points very well and his treatment of the Church and the Last Things are among the best written since Emil Brunner’s *Dogmatics*.

This volume is a mixed bag. If one can get past the maximalism of Horton's view of Scripture and overlook (or better, supplement) his inadequate view of Zwingli, one can easily appreciate his valiant effort.

If one is unable, though, to set aside those things along with Horton's clear bias for Calvin (whom he cites, along with his heirs, far more frequently than anyone else), then one will be disappointed by the whole even if delighted by various thought provoking breadcrumbs strewn along the path for pilgrims headed to the wondrous land of theological truth.

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